The Division and Fall of the Venezuelan Labor Movement in the Chávez Years

Honors Research Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation "with Honors Reseach Distinction in Political Science" in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

By

Joey Longley

The Ohio State University

May 2013

Project Advisor: Professor Marcus Kurtz, Department of Political Science

There has been much evolution in the Venezuelan labor movement in the past fifteen years. I will discuss how and why Venezuela has seen its labor movement split into several distinct groups, including two major labor groups which position themselves at different ends of the Venezuelan political spectrum and organize themselves in very distinct ways. I will answer the question of why Venezuela elected a leader who identifies with the left, yet there has been so much animosity between President Hugo Chávez and the major, established labor group, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (Venezuelan Confederation of Workers or CTV). Traditionally, the left is supportive of labor, yet in this case Venezuela has not seen the cooperation between the Chávez government and the labor movement that an outside observer may have expected. The answer to this question will also reveal why the Venezuelan labor movement experienced a split and why the two labor groups have since organized themselves in the fashion that they have.

I will answer this question by claiming that the entrenched interests of labor were not in line, and had to be sacrificed, in order for Chávez to appeal to and galvanize the voters that ultimately won him election. As part of the establishment of Venezuelan politics and representing those who were already fairly well off in the Venezuelan economy, the labor movement was not a natural fit for a new Chávez presidency that promised a departure from the established interests and powers of Venezuela. Those who elected Chávez were the voters who were previously disenchanted by the established groups who controlled a plurality of Venezuelan political power in the past because they were a cohesive group. This includes non-unionized urban workers, who overwhelmingly support Chávez. With declining unionization and the disintegration of the established party system, the unionized workers were losing power, however no one was able to galvanize the non-unionized workers to vote in large numbers

despite compulsory voting laws. With many unionized workers in the highly profitable oil sector, those who were unionized before Chávez were relatively well off. Therefore, they had little incentive to support a drastic change from the status quo. However, once the status quo was changed with the election and the implementation of Chávez's policies, including the direct control of the nationalized oil industry, there was pressure on the unions from several different directions (Wilpert, 2007, 188). This included those who thought it possible to return to the days of old and defeat Chávez through any means possible, those (mostly outside of the oil sector) who supported Chávez in the Bolívarian Revolution and were eager to join his camp, and those who could see the writing on the wall that Chávez would become increasingly powerful and thought it wise to work from the inside for their goals. The election of Chávez and his subsequent policies made it inevitable that labor would not only split, but also surrender much of its political power by lacking the unity that it once had. Instead of buying off the established labor groups, Chávez chose to confront them in order to gain credibility with a population who he had promised radical change to in the previous election. In order to best show that he was serious about radically changing Venezuela, Chávez needed to confront the oligarchs of the past, not buy them off. They were politically toxic at the time and a confrontational relationship with oligarchs paid off politically for Chávez. He was freed to do more to support the base who had elected him originally and was able to not only ignore the interests of the entrenched powers, but to actively attack them. With such pressure being applied from the top to the Venezuelan labor establishment and such radical change being pursued by the Chávez presidency, there was no way that the Venezuelan labor movement could stay in place as it was. The factions that had co-existed would be split apart because of the pressure exerted by Chávez and the uncertainty regarding what the future of the labor movement was. Instead of being a small, but fairly unified

faction that could cobble together enough support to reasonably win a plurality in elections, it has declined and become far less relevant.

In order to properly analyze how and why this split occurred and the state of Venezuelan labor today, I will also discuss the major actors in Venezuelan labor politics. The major actors are Hugo Chávez, the opposition political parties and coalitions throughout and before Chávez's time in office including *Accion Democratica* (Democratic Action or AD) and *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independient* (Christian Democrats or COPEI), the traditional labor union CTV, and the new, left-wing offshoot of the CTV, the *Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (National Workers' Union of Venezuela or UNT). I will analyze the evolution of these actors over the Chávez years, including the political strategies pursued, their role and reaction to major events, and their relative rise and fall throughout the Chávez years. The study of Chávez will demonstrate the actions that he has taken throughout his time in office, the affect that has had on labor, and the increasing political power he developed throughout his term in office. Looking at the opposition will reveal the continued deterioration of labor's relevance and power in the larger Venezuelan political conversation. The study of the CTV will demonstrate the response of those in labor who wanted a return to the status quo before Chávez and the frittering away of political resources that the CTV still had. The discussion of the UNT will show what the new labor movement looks like and how, despite its rise in relation to the CTV, it has had little influence in implementing its progressive vision of labor in Venezuela. Ultimately, this paper will answer the question of why labor has grown increasingly irrelevant over the past fifteen years. All of this will provide better insight into what caused the divide and growing irrelevance of labor throughout the past fifteen years. Through decades of increasing liberalization, decreasing union membership, and bickering factions, I will discuss and explain

the successes and failures of the labor movement to effectively represent workers and have a voice in Venezuelan government. I will closely analyze the structure and function of both the right-leaning CTV and the left-leaning UNT and why they have chosen to operate in the way that they do.

I will now describe alternate ways that the political situation in Venezuela could have developed. Then I will spend the rest of the paper describing how and why the situation developed the way that it did instead of viable alternates that could have developed. Alternate to the way that I have described the evolution of Venezuela's political system, there are several different ways that the Chávez-labor relationship could have developed. Instead of a labor movement that aligns strongly with the interests of Venezuelan business, there could have been a more progressive labor movement already dominant in Venezuela. If this existed and labor generally approved of the way that it advocated for its interests, it is possible that Chávez would never have had room to run in the first place. Instead of a convergence of the two parties major parties, the balance of power could have been maintained and the Venezuelan electorate may not have demanded a total revolution in the function of the Venezuelan government. This could have been reality if this left party was able to maintain opposition to neoliberal policies demanded by Western international powers and was able to demonstrate care for the growing population of workers that are not affiliated with labor unions. Though the labor vote had always been a small percentage of the total Venezuelan electorate, it was a very powerful one because it stood at the intersection of money and unity of a segment of the population. Instead of calls for revolution, democracy would have taken its course and power would have been shared, instead of a fifteen-year dominance by one party. I will argue that the socioeconomic status of many members of the labor movement is the reason this reality did not occur. Because

unionized workers were generally satisfied with the status quo in Venezuela, it was natural for them to align with the interests of business when faced with the reality of the departure from the status quo policies Chávez pursued. Had there been a more well defined left-right dichotomy in Venezuela, there may not have been room for Chávez to come to power. Instead, the differences between the two parties became less clear throughout the years.

Another possible alternate reality in Venezuela is one where after Chávez was elected, the CTV doesn't overreact and attempt to remove him from office by force. Under this reality, instead of Chávez facing an increasingly fractured opposition in his subsequent elections, he faces a more cohesive opposition, including a united, responsible labor movement still operating as the CTV, which still opposes his aggressive policies and virulently anti-CTV rhetoric. While there are still those who are more liberal in the CTV, they choose not to splinter off (fearing parallel, powerless unionism) and instead support the union as the main protector of their job and livelihood. While they do not agree with everything that the CTV is doing (especially its overly friendly ties with Western powers and the chamber of commerce, Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción de Venezuela (FEDECAMARAS)), they recognize that it is using democratic means to win back the power that has secured them a position near the top of the socio-economic structure in Venezuela. This unity allows the opposition to create a coalition capable of defeating Chávez and he eventually loses re-election. I will argue that this doesn't happen, not only because of the over reach by the CTV, but because of the high pressure put on much of labor by the policies and rhetoric of Chávez.

Yet another possible alternate reality is one in which Chávez buys off the CTV through sympathetic policies that will allow them to be content with their political lot in a Chávez presidency. Chávez decides that instead of attacking the CTV and the other oligarchs, Chávez

decides that keeping them happy will mean far less political opposition and allow him to be less impeded by the strikes, attempted coup, and recall election that are to come if he pursues policies counter to the established powers. Chávez can then claim to have united the elite with the masses and enjoy political popularity. Instead of having to deal with intense opposition, Chavez could have bought off the labor unions and moved on with other parts of his foreign and domestic policy agenda. I argue that this did not happen because the electorate was hungry for someone who was willing to take down those who had been in control of Venezuela for decades past. Instead of supporting the Chávez presidency after its embrace of traditional labor, Venezuelans demanded someone who would take down those who for so long did not help them rise out of their current political estate. This is why Chávez not only didn't support the CTV, but he openly attacked them through legislation that damaged the CTV. Chávez needed an "other" to attack in order to successfully win over the population who most fervently supported him, the Chávistas. It was his unorthodoxy that made Chávistas so loyal to him, as he was one who would not give in to political pressures to bow to the oligarchy, but was spending his political capital where no other Venezuelan head of state had ever spent it: on the urban poor and non-unionized worker.

The final alternate reality is one where Chávez decides to include the newly formed UNT as an important part of his coalition. Instead of viewing the urban poor as his main concern, Chávez chooses to integrate the UNT as another key priority in his Bolívarian Revolution. Not only does Chávez care about those who have not had a voice in Venezuelan politics over the past decades, he also wants to represent those who have been misrepresented by the oligarchs who were in control of their organizations. He wants laborers to have more of a voice and supports horizontal leadership structures in factories and the oil industry, giving power to the people and

casting a strong counter to the hierarchical structure of Western industry and government. I will argue that this reality did not occur because Chávez did not trust the UNT enough to allow them any sort of *real* power. He also did not need them to keep his coalition alive, especially as it grew in power throughout his presidency.

The Growing Power of President Hugo Chávez's New Coalition

First, I will discuss Hugo Chávez's role in the national labor movement. I will discuss his rise to power, his first campaign, the three-day coup, his increasing power, and his radicalization. These major events will describe Chávez's central role in many different areas of labor relations in Venezuela, as President Chávez was increasing in power, he was also able to take more control of Venezuelan labor. As Chávez's power increased, labor's former prominence became near irrelevance. The major events and relationships of the Chávez years include the response of opposition labor groups to Chávez (demonstrated most clearly in the oil strike of 2002), the fracturing of the CTV and the further fracturing of the CTV offshoot UNT, and the relationship between the UNT and the Chávez government. Chávez has been central to the development of labor politics over the past fifteen years, giving limited favor to some groups and shutting the door of influence on others. Whether or not one is a Chávez supporter, it is undisputed that Chávez's influence in Venezuelan politics as president has been significant and has generally grown throughout his presidency. Therefore, any study of Venezuelan labor would be incomplete without a close study of how Chávez has operated generally and in regards to labor throughout his time in office. Primarily, this discussion will demonstrate the central role that Chávez has played in the fracturing and fall of labor in Venezuela. It was his initial shock to the labor system by his election and his subsequent policies, which caused labor to overreact and try to take him out of office by force. This caused labor to split, which has meant that it has been

difficult to muster a serious opposition to him after his initial election. This resulted in his continually increasing influence throughout the rest of his time in office. One may expect that a leftist such as Chávez would eventually get the support of the labor unions and that they would not unite with FEDECAMARAS in opposition to his presidency. The CTV was a major part of the Venezuelan status quo, therefore they held a lot of power before their fall. However, since Chávez's goal was for a political revolution that took power from the powers that be, he did not create an alliance with labor. Because it was clear that Chávez was not going to appeal to labor in the same way that the old party system did, many in labor were more inclined to work with the FEDECAMARAS than they were to work with Chávez. This recognition of the future of Venezuela's government pushed an already conservative labor movement further towards the right. An alliance with FEDECAMARAS in opposition to a political figure who was likely to overthrow the system that had been working quite well for them was an attractive prospect, fearing that their previous influence would be greatly and permanently diminished in a Chávez presidency.

I will further describe the way that Chávez came to power during the 1998 election, describing the political context and the strategy employed by Chávez that lead to his first electoral victory in order to describe the political atmosphere in which he came to office. This will demonstrate the context in which the labor-government relations in the Chávez administration began, including the larger Venezuelan population's dissatisfaction with previous administrations. President Chávez began his political career with an attempted coup of 1992. Though he was unsuccessful, he was granted time on national television to speak to his supporters and ask them to lay down their arms. During this time, Chávez was successful in

galvanizing his future base of support, many of whom were largely ignored by the established political powers (including labor) who Chávez tried to overthrow.

The established political powers were generally members or close associates of AD and COPEI and they were generally beholden to business leaders, CTV labor leaders, and the authorities of the Catholic Church in Venezuela (Ramirez 2005, 80). The CTV had a close association with the AFL-CIO and the American government, which advocated for neoliberal economic policies, which were widely opposed by Venezuelans (Sustar 2005, 99). Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the United States supported the CTV in its alliance with FEDECAMARAS throughout its attempted coup in 2002. Though continued funding of the CTV through the NED certainly doesn't mean that the United States orchestrated or supported the coup, it does mean that there was an ongoing relationship. By the time that the NED funding was happening, the CTV/AD were supporting the neo-liberal policies advocated for by the West. The established groups' leaders were generally lighter in skin tone and were part of the elite in Venezuela's socio-economic structure (Ramirez 2005, 82). During the 1980s and 1990s, the Venezuelan bolívar burst when oil prices collapsed, sending the Venezuelan economy in the same downward direction as much of South America (Danopoulos 2003, 63). These leaders were also generally friendly with Western powers including the United States and had begun to pursue and support neoliberal policies following the economic downturn and the Washington Consensus set of neoliberal policies essentially forced upon many South American countries. The population Chávez appealed to were not the main targets of policy supported by the traditional leaders of Venezuela and had, in general, been apathetic in previous political discussions. Even with compulsory voting laws in place, voter turnout fell precipitously throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Danopoulos 2003, 65). Many of those who now are known as

"Chávistas" include the urban poor and non-unionized workers, who, because of their lack of organization into an easily accessible group, were largely ignored and unreached in previous elections. With his time on television in 1992, Chávez rose to national prominence and, with his release from prison two years later, Chávez started his national political career by founding the Movimiento Quinta República (MVR) political party that would lead to his election as president of Venezuela (LaBotz, The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn" 2007).

Chávez's attempted coup revealed weakness in the Venezuelan establishment and a dissatisfaction with a previously internationally highly praised political system lead by the sharing of power predominately between AD and COPEI political parties (Morgan 2004, 82). Instead of being cast as the man who tried to gain power outside of democratic means and tried to take down the popularly elected leaders of Venezuela, Chávez gained legitimacy and national notoriety through his attempted coup due to the deep dissatisfaction of the Venezuelan electorate in the current government. Chávez did not cause the traditional parties to be disliked widely by the Venezuelan people, however he was the first to be able to take advantage of this dissatisfaction electorally. Previous challengers had fallen short of defeating AD and COPEI associated candidates, though the traditional parties only won by a plurality, not a majority, for several election cycles. With his appearance on national television after the failed coup, the charismatic Chávez was launched into a position to be a legitimate contender for Venezuela's highest office by gaining national notoriety. Just one year after Chávez's failed coup attempt, President Carlos Andrés Pérez was impeached and forced to leave office for allegations of corruption. This reinforced Chávez's criticism of the current party structure as a group of corrupt elitists. Though Chávez used undemocratic means to try to gain power, his charisma and distinctly new message were enough to overcome his means of trying to gain power. He had hit

a nerve in Venezuelan politics that hadn't been touched before, empowering a large (and growing, due to the recession) group of voters who had not previously been mobilized. This group was hungry to be represented and were undeterred by Chávez's attempted coup conflicting with democratic principles. Chávez's opposition has failed to gain much traction since 1998; I will discuss his opposition and the establishment of the two political parties further in a later section. The combination of corruption, economic downturn, and newly emerging engaged electoral sectors allowed Chávez to not only have a chance to defeat the established system, but to win in a convincing fashion. In order to be successful in enacting the revolutionary measures he promised, Chávez would not only need to convincingly win his election, but also crush his opposition. His opposition knew this and fought back with ferocity. Chávez's main response to the opposition parties was the onset of the Bolívarian Revolution, which called for the overthrow of the major powers who, by and large, controlled the system. Drawing upon the anti-imperialist liberation figure of Simon Bolívar, Chávez called for a new revolution both domestically and internationally, overthrowing the oligarchs that are holding the people of Venezuela from economic and political prosperity.

When Chávez first ran for president in 1998, he framed his election as a "battle between the people versus the oligarchy" (David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University 2011, 3). This framing allowed him to tap into the deep animosity felt towards the rulers and elite of Venezuela. These "oligarchs" were perceived as richer, whiter, and more corrupt than the rest of the population. Under the previous administrations' rule (all of whom were closely linked to the oligarchy that Chávez described), living standards had precipitously declined, especially in the 1980's. Multiple coalitions criticized the incumbent government and claimed they "lacked the capacity to govern." There were several disorganized movements

calling for social change with the economic difficulties that happened after the debt crisis (David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University 2011, 12). The opposition to the establishment government was largely economic in nature, though some emphasized the increased corruption present in the federal government. It was difficult to work within the existing system to enact change due to the intact corrupt system, which kept Venezuelan government in the same state throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, exemplified by the decreasing support for AD and COPEI, yet the persistent pluralities that they would win in legislative election campaigns (Morgan 2004, 83). Though they were waning in support, they still maintained high name recognition and had a shrinking sliver of the population in ardent support of them. Without an organized, coherent opposition, they were able to continue to trade power while shrinking their bases. The system kept the established parties in power long after they had lost favor with the electorate. Though this allowed the establishment political parties to retain control for a longer period of time, it also created a political atmosphere where the electorate was hungry for radical change from the current system. It looked for a unifying figure that was able to get groups that were previously separated to coalesce in opposition to AD and COPEI. This put a left-leaning figure like Chávez in an awkward position regarding labor. He had to choose whether or not to fully eschew the entire establishment (even the elements of labor that he liked) or to potentially be corrupted and attacked as being part of the same establishment that his opponents and predecessors were a part of.

Social change needed to be enacted through a massive electoral victory, since the system in place before Chávez was meant to "perpetuate the entrenched spoils system" (David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University 2011, 5). Chávez viewed it as nearly impossible to work with AD and COPEI to enact the policy goals that he had, as he

viewed them as corrupt and uninterested in working with him. This led Chávez to run and win as a fresh voice "of the people." Chávez took advantage of this perception to contrast his opponents through his hyper-populist rhetoric and his darker skin. Since few considered themselves oligarchs and few desired to become an oligarch or admired the oligarchs, this strategy had potential to be successful for Chávez. These groups were enough to create a plurality in Venezuelan electoral politics and they certainly had the money and power to mount a formidable national election, however they left room for an appealing opposition candidate like Chávez to gain support from much of the Venezuelan population, if he was able to unify them. In contrast to the population the traditional coalition appealed to, Chávez appealed to groups that had largely felt ignored and unincorporated to these groups and also took a foreign policy stance of "anti-imperialism", referring to the neoliberal policies implemented by previous administrations at the urging of the great Western powers (Ramirez 2005, 83). Chávez appealed especially, though not exclusively, to those in the urban lower third socioeconomically, as this group was not previously mobilized in any political direction in a convincing way (Wilpert 2007).

Chávez was the first candidate to combine a national presence (due to the attempted coup), charisma, and policy positions and campaign strategy appealing to the urban poor. Combining these factors with the deterioration of the traditional party system allowed Chávez to be viewed as a legitimate alternative to the traditional party choices. Chávez was also able to make alliances with smaller left wing parties, capitalizing on his perceived legitimacy as a candidate (Danopoulos 2003, 66). Chávez campaigned against the traditional parties, accusing them of having squandered the oil resources abundant in Venezuela (Danopoulos 2003, 63). Chávez promised to turn oil revenue into programs that benefit the increasing population of those

in poverty in Venezuela. He also promised to double the minimum wage and to defy Western capitalism by defaulting on foreign debt caused by bad deals signed previously (Danopoulos 2003, 71).

In December 1998 Chávez won convincingly with over fifty-six percent of the vote, fully overcoming his initial skepticism that the established Venezuelan powers would not allow an election result to take them out of power. With the precipitous decline of both AD and COPEI in the previous decade, Chávez was able to secure the votes of Venezuelans who identified as independents and those whose party affiliation was more variable, such as the poor and women, who were often ignored by the established political parties (Morgan 2004, 87). With a weak performance in the legislative elections a month before the presidential election, AD and COPEI both pulled support from their presidential candidates to support Proyecto Venezuela's Henrique Salas Römer, an unprecedented move underscoring the grave state of Venezuela's establishment parties. Combining rising popularity among previously unengaged voters and the decline of the established political parties due to a lack of adjustment to changing demographics and policy in line with Western neoliberal policy, Chávez was able to successfully win election by a large margin.

Some have argued that Chávez's massive electoral victories since 1998 cannot be fully explained by simply casting the Chávistas as the "poor and the uninformed" (Ramirez 2005, 79). Instead, the Chávistas see Chávez as merely the leader of the larger Bolívarian Revolution, fighting the oligarchs and the neoliberal imperialists. Ramirez claims that many of the Chávistas do not fall into either the poor or the uninformed categories, and are fighting for a future in Venezuela that is far different from the increasingly similar futures presented by AD and COPEI. Instead of pursuing more liberal policies, Chávez offered distinctly more government support for

workers. This view would include those workers who would break from the CTV to form the UNT. Not only do they argue that the Chavista movement is a much broader movement than critics suggest, they also argue that it is a much deeper movement, not only loyal to one man, but to the ideology of the Bolívarian Revolution that Chávez has laid out. The CTV offered its support to AD, and remains closely associated on a political and institutional level. Like AD, the CTV has supported the most likely opposition candidate against Chávez since his 1998 election. Instead of being based on political party, the opposition candidate has been unaffiliated with the major political parties and was selected based on personal attributes.

Chávez was immediately a threat to labor when he came into office. Once in office, Chávez took steps that dramatically strengthened his political hand. Chávez had 122 of the 131 seats in the Constitutional Assembly and appointed loyal judges to the bench. By 2000, he controlled two-thirds of the newly unicameral legislature. In response to this increase in control, the opposition rose up more strongly against Chávez, using all methods possible to not only oppose him, but to try to remove him from office. In November 2001, Chávez enacted 49 laws not passed by the Assembly under the Enabling Law. The same month, labor and business called the first nationwide strike of the oil industry. In response, Chávez took more control of the Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), in March 2002 (Nelson 2009, 6). Through this control of the PDVSA, Chávez had more direct control over the most important resource in the country and the CTV's most powerful political weapon, oil (Sustar 2005, 99). Chavez's political actions lead to the April 2002 coup by CTV, FEDECAMARMAS, and other opposition leaders.

` The CTV, FEDECAMARAS and allies demonstrated that it was more than willing to use the power it had with their control of oil in order to bring the country's economy to its knees to achieve its political purposes. This is most clearly demonstrated through the 2002 coup against

Chávez's government. While successful for three days in the coup of Chávez, the coup attempt fell under its own weight as President Carmona (the leader of FEDECAMARAS) quickly lost allies and support. The Chávistas were intent upon putting Chávez back into power as the legitimate leader of Venezuela's government. The failed coup did not stop Chávez's opponents from attempting two more strikes and a recall election aimed at removing him from office. These were all unsuccessful and lead to the further perceptions of desperation and disrespect for the law and democracy on the part of the opposition. The opposition was the very same people who the Venezuelan public was so dissatisfied with when they controlled most of the levers of the Venezuelan government. Without a new alternative vision for Venezuela's government, there was not adequate support for the overthrow of the Chávez presidency for a return to the policies of previous administrations. In response to the coup, Chávez was somewhat shaken by his near ouster. In response, Chávez withdrew his selections of loyalists to head the PDVSA, instead replacing them with OPEC Secretary General Ali Rodriguez Araque (Danopoulos 2003, 70). This concession to his opposition was short-lived, as the opposition continued to overreach for power through subsequent strikes. Chávez continued to take more control of the PDVSA after the subsequent failed oil strikes.

Chávez also signed legislation that imposed direct elections on the CTV for the first time, controlling the internal politics of the CTV (Sustar 2005, 100). This downward pressure from the top of the Venezuelan government was crucial in splitting the labor movement into distinct groups. Not only was it clear that the CTV was dealing with an entirely new political system, where they were no longer the pet project of political leaders, but it was also clear that it would not be easy to defeat Chávez through democratic means. The CTV not only couldn't count on having a crucial voice in the government anymore, but it was also being openly attacked by the

policies of the young Chávez presidency. Chávez was serious when he threatened the oligarchy, saying that their days with the exclusive control of the levers of Venezuelan political power were coming to a close. It is clear that leaders in the labor movement, who controlled money, a powerful voting block, and represented the increasingly shrinking middle class and upper middle class in Venezuela (especially after the crash of the rest of the economy), were squarely in the category of the elite. It was clear to leaders in the labor movement that action needed to be taken in order to combat these new policies and retain their former status. The means of carrying that out were up for debate, and there was no clear consensus.

The CTV aligned closely with FEDECAMARAS because its interests in preserving the previous administration aligned closely together. With many of those unaffected by the financial crash in Venezuela a member of the CTV, it made sense that its interests would align closely with the interest of business. Instead of representing the middle or lower class of labor, many of the CTV's workers were in the upper or upper-middle class of Venezuela's socio-economic structure. With this untraditional structure (much of which is due to abundant oil resources), the CTV had an untraditional structure for organizing itself. With such a radical change in policies, especially in the foreign policy arena, the policies of the Chávez presidency further unified and fortified the alliance between business and labor (Sustar 2005, 100). Instead of letting the system that allowed for prosperity for those in organized labor and for Venezuelan business leaders, there was a major upheaval that fundamentally changed the way that Venezuela was run. This created a much closer association between business and the CTV.

After the April 2002 coup and subsequent failed opposition, there was little to no room for Chávez supporters and those on the left to ally with the CTV anymore. With the CTV squarely in the corner of Chávez's "elite" opposition due to the distinct interests of those less

affected by a hemorrhaging economy within the CTV, the left leaning elements of the labor movement broke off to form the UNT. There has been debate among scholars as to whether the UNT is merely an arm of the Chávez administration or is an independent labor group that has its own interests and goals (Sustar 2005, 98). Nonetheless, with the breakaway of the UNT from the CTV, Chávez made efforts to present an olive branch to the UNT. The government provided office space in the Ministry of Labor for the UNT, giving the government some sense of control over this sector of labor and setting off warnings that Chávez may be trying to control the activities of organized labor in the country (Sustar 2005, 100). The UNT, however, has been far from in lock step with Chávez, as will be discussed later.

As the elite continued to ardently oppose Chávez, Chávez became a more radical leader (Wilpert 2007). The opposition took steps to derail Chávez's agenda, however they found that they locked *themselves* out of control in Venezuela more and more. Those in the military who participated in the coup were left out of control in the military, the strike in the oil industry by Ortega left the government more in control than ever, and the boycott of the legislature by COPEI left Chávez with more loyal majorities (Wilpert 2007). As the levers of government and civil society became more in the control of Chávez, the more radical the attacks upon his governance were.

These attacks left Chávez with no desire or incentive to cooperate with his opposition, but instead drove him to be more of a radical. It also allowed Chávez to develop a certain sense of invincibility, in that the extreme attacks upon his presidency had all come up void and he felt his control over the country ever increasing. In 2005, Chávez declared himself a Cuban-inspired socialist (Wilpert 2007, 5). Though Chávez attacked worker's ability to organize in some instances such as in the oil industry, Chávez allowed workers control of the aluminum and other

industries. It would be unfair to say that Chávez has been completely against labor, especially given his cooperation with the UNT (LaBotz, The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn" 2007). Though Chávez has taken direct steps to attack the CTV, this is unsurprising and reflective of his view of labor as a whole, given that the CTV attempted to remove him from office through non-democratic means. With very little power inside or outside the government, there was little that the opposition could do to stop his agenda moving forward. This has left Chávez with a very strong hand to play since the strikes and coup of the early 2000's. Since then, Chávez has been able to exercise control over the labor unions, controlling the UNT to some extent and challenging the CTV's dominance in the labor movement. He has also been able to be dominant in electoral contests, easily winning each of his elections until the marginally closer 2012 contest.

The Opposition's Coalition Building Attempts

The main opposition to Chávez during his time in office was the previously established leadership of Venezuela for decades before he came to power. This included some military leaders, high-ranking Catholic officials, the CTV, FEDECAMARAS, and the executives of the PDVSA. These groups had the resources to mount successful national campaigns in the past, but have failed to mount serious opposition electorally to Chávez since his initial election in 1998 until a fairly close, though still comfortable, victory for Chávez in 2012. I will discuss the political opposition to Chávez before and throughout his time in office. I will begin by discussing the history of both AD and COPEI, then I will discuss each of Chávez's elections (1998, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2012). I will analyze the results, specifically focusing on how the opposition cast itself in terms of the discussion of labor and the UNT-CTV split. This context will allow us to further see the political context and the strategies of the opposition in which the

CTV and the UNT operated and developed throughout the past fifteen years. It will also demonstrate the dwindling power of the labor movement after the split between the CTV and the UNT.

The Accion Democratica (AD) party was and remains closely tied to the functioning of the CTV in Venezuela. Labor in Venezuela was a unified front for a long time, with AD giving even the least influential voices in labor a seat on the CTV executive board (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past 2005). This made sure that the whole range of views and interests were represented in decision-making and that the union felt truly representative. However, this also meant that other labor groups did not represent minority voices, but coalitions would cobble together majorities that represented the views of at least fifty percent of the labor umbrella group. Thus, the major interests (such as oil) were dominant in creating the policies of the labor group. The credibility that the CTV lent to member groups is one of the factors that kept this broad coalition together for such a long time.

The AD had traded control with the COPEI for decades before the rise of the MVR and Chávez. There were signs of a break in support for the AD as Venezuela fought their debt crisis, however the precipitous drop in support for the AD came when President Carlos Andres Perez embraced Western neoliberal policies, breaking a campaign pledge he had made in order to get elected (Morgan 2004, 82). He was also impeached and forced from office after being accused of the embezzlement of over 250 million bolívars (Danopoulos 2003, 65). Labor had a definitive place in the AD, however the growing number of urban poor and informal workers were never reached out to or integrated into the party in a meaningful way. This meant that the demographics of Venezuela were turning sharply against the AD, especially as jobs were lost and poverty grew as a result of the crisis. This economic downturn dramatically changed the

political landscape and AD was unable to adequately respond to these issues, instead continuing to cater to the entrenched interests that they always had appealed to. The interests that it appealed to (business and labor) were contrary to the interests of emerging groups of new voters. Women also felt less appealed to, as they were starting to gain more of a political voice in Venezuela and had never been particularly attached to any political ideology. AD was unsuccessful in catering its message to women as a new sector of the electorate.

COPEI was, for a long time, the foil of the AD and they were the opposition party for much of the period preceding Chávez's rule. COPEI was greatly damaged when their leader Rafael Caldera left the party in anger, won the presidential election, and subsequently pursued policies that would undermine the effectiveness of the COPEI. Eventually, AD and COPEI began to look more and more similar in the eyes of the public (Morgan 2004, 82). It appeared to them that they had similar policy positions on a wide array of issues, meaning that Venezuelans felt that they had little choice between the two parties for preferred policy positions. Instead, they felt that they had to choose between two parties that were going to pursue similar policies once they were in office, decreasing the desire to vote for many Venezuelans despite compulsory voting instituted in Venezuela. With a radically different political landscape after the debt crisis took its toll on the Venezuelan economy, the convergence of AD and COPEI did little to continue the established party system in Venezuela.

This convergence of the two parties, along with their internal struggles, and national demographic changes resulted in the election of more independents in the legislature throughout the 1990's, weakening the institutional and political strength of the traditional party organizations. However, the two parties (or their former members with similar political ideologies) still held on to the presidency and the plurality of the legislature until the election of

Chávez in 1998. With both parties in disarray in 1998, they lost badly in the legislative elections a month before the presidential election was scheduled to take place. Both parties abandoned their presidential candidate to support Proyecto Venezuela founder Henrique Salas Römer (Morgan 2004, 83). He was soundly defeated by Chávez and since then the AD and COPEI have combined to account for just 15% of Venezuelan party identification. By 1998, 74% percent of Venezuelans described the Caldera government as either "poor" or "extremely poor" (Molina 2002, 222). This discontent with the government opened the door for a plausible opposition candidate such as Chávez (Morgan 2004). Chávez won the 1998 election with 3,673,665 votes (56.2%) compared to Römer who received 2,613,161 (40%). This represented a massive swing against the establishment and towards the Chávez movement, accounted for by the factors previously mentioned (Molina 2002).

With a new Constitution (with new election laws) overwhelmingly approved by the voters in 1999, Chávez faced re-election in 2000 just two years into his administration. With the vote just two years into Chávez's presidency, many of Venezuela's persistent problems were attributed to Chávez's predecessors and Chávez was successful in being re-elected to a longer six-year term from the previously constitutionally mandated five year term. The opposition in the 2000 election did not come from either the AD or the COPEI, instead coming from Francisco Arias of *La Causa R* (Molina 2002, 232). This marked a transition from party politics to the "politics of personality", with candidates' campaigns being less about carrying the banner of a party to being about an individual's charisma and ability to connect with the Venezuelan voting population (Ramirez 2005). Arias was part of Chávez's 1992 attempted coup, and had been a Chávez disciple in the 1998 election. He claimed to be the one who would faithfully execute the vision of the Bolívarian Revolution. This demonstrates that, while this attempt to defeat Chávez

was unsuccessful, the Bolívarian Revolution may not be limited to just being about Chávez himself. Though Chávistas certainly have developed an allegiance to Chávez, there are certainly those who disagree with the practical way that Chávez has executed his political mandate, but share the vision of a socialist revolution that frees Venezuela from the "Western imperialists." This also demonstrated that the established interests were unsuccessful in mounting serious opposition just two years after losing power. Chávez was successful in his re-election, building on his 1998 victory by receiving 3,757,773 (59.8%) votes in the final tally of the 2000 election, compared to Arias who received 2,359,459 (37.5%) votes (Venezuela 2013).

Chávez campaigned in 2000 on the success of reforms to the government, specifically to creating a new constitution in 1999. He touted his administration as one that was putting Venezuela back on track to economic growth and pulling the poor and disenfranchised out of extreme poverty. This was contrasted to Arias, who attacked Chávez on his support of Cuban President Fidel Castro and his support of far-left policies. Arias believed that Venezuela called for change, however the change that Chávez was delivering was far too radical to be good for the Venezuelan economy and people (Molina 2002, 236). A lack of party identification left Venezuelans without distinctions in the placement of candidates on an ideological spectrum. While Arias was not as far to the left as Chávez, he certainly represented a left-wing candidacy, leaving the political right unrepresented in the 2000 election.

After the strikes and coup of 2001-2003, Chávez's opposition attempted to end his presidency through referendum in 2004, as a final effort to dismantle Chávez's presidency. With such polarization and division in Venezuela, Chávez had the advantage of a severely weakened opposition without much institutional strength. Much of that strength had been abandoned by the abstention from parliamentary elections, labor strikes, and other acts of abstention that left

the opposition out of control of many levers of government and civil society. Chávez was victorious in the recall referendum, with "No" receiving 5,800,629 (59.1%) votes and "Si" receiving 3,989,008 (40.6%) votes (Venezuela 2013). Turnout was much higher in this election, demonstrating an increased voter engagement during the referendum election. Had Chávez received the same number of votes that he received in 2000, he would have been defeated in the referendum campaign.

In the 2006 Presidential election, a weak, divided, and disempowered opposition faced a resilient Chávez, who had survived both the attempted coup and a recall election. Chavez continued to grow in power and labor was still shrinking from defeat. With the denouncing of the 2004 recall referendum results, the opposition attacked the legitimacy of the election process. This left opposition supporters not trusting the electoral system, making it less likely that they would go to the polls on election day. Though there were officially twenty-five candidates for election to the presidency, only Chávez and Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales were considered the favorites. The opposition picked Rosales as someone who was "different from those of the past, who comes from below, who has suffered, who has been successful in his life and knows how to listen." He was viewed as moderate and did not propose changing the Constitution created by Chávez, demonstrating that the opposition was weakened enough that they did not consider it feasible to radically change the system that Chávez had put into place through his 1999 Constitution and subsequent policies. Instead, the opposition tempered their goals, trying to finally oust Chávez from office. Nonetheless, Rosales was unable to initially unify the opposition. There were still several opposition candidates, along with some in the opposition advocating a boycott, which they claimed didn't truly reflect the will of the Venezuelan people. Despite their claims of electoral fraud, international election groups including the Carter Center

verified the elections as legitimate. Eventually, however, there was general unity in the opposition behind the candidacy of Rosales. Rosales campaigned that the Chávez administration had been too focused on Chávez's goal of 10 million votes, not the goal of doing good work "for the 26 million Venezuelans" (David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University 2011).

Chávez defined his electoral theme as "a socialist and revolutionary participatory-democratic model", proposing a constitutional change that would allow him to remain in office indefinitely. Chávez contrasted himself strongly with the opposition, claiming that they had no real positions and that their election would bring a great deal of uncertainty to the Revolution and to foreign policy, especially in regards to relations with the United States. The opposition was portrayed as supporters of United States President George W. Bush's administration, giving in to the neoliberal policies of the past that President Chávez had fought hard against throughout his administration. This polarizing message did not poll well with the undecided voters, causing an abrupt change to a theme of "love." Chávez had a comfortable lead, around twenty points going into election day (with some polls showing a much closer race), and was confident of victory on December 3rd. Chávez won with 7,161,637 votes, falling short of his goal of 10,000,000 votes, and receiving 62.9% of the vote in comparison to the 36.9% received by Rosales (Venezuela 2013). This represented, however, a decrease in abstention and a sharp fall in third party votes, with the next closest candidates receiving less than 5,000 votes. This momentum for Chávez was stopped, however when Chávez's proposed Constitutional changes were defeated by the voters in 2007. This was his first electoral defeat since being elected to the presidency in 1998.

Despite the electoral defeat of 2007, Chávez was successful in being elected once again in 2012. He received 54% of the vote, compared to Capriles' 44%, the closest contest in

Chávez's electoral history (Venezuela 2013). This was the closest contest that Chávez had faced, and with declining health, it was unclear whether or not Chávez still had the confidence of the Venezuelan people. After the 2012 election, Chávez spent much of his time in Cuba receiving treatment for his cancer, leaving Vice President Nicolas Maduro in charge of the day-to-day operations of the country. Upon his death, Maduro took control of the presidency and faces an election of his own against Capriles.

With the continued alliance between the CTV and AD, it was clear that the CTV was waning in electoral political power, as AD continued to be unable to put up serious challengers to Chávez or to even be a key part of the coalition that opposed him. Instead, the "politics of personality" was dominant, with the opposition often unsuccessfully trying to beat Chávez at his own game of personal electoral popularity. The UNT, with its divisions between the ranks of Chávistas and non-Chávistas, got little traction in having major influence in the elections. Even the Chavista members of the UNT were unsuccessful in attaining their political goals and getting major concessions from the Chávez government. Overall, the analysis of the election demonstrates labor's diminishing role and the inability of the opposition to form a coalition. It also demonstrates that Chávez was gaining political power until the end of his presidency, when he was still able to win handily.

CTV's Attempt at a Return to the Status Quo and Deterioration of Power

The CTV is the umbrella group for traditional labor unions in Venezuela. It has functioned on the political right (as far as labor unions go) in Venezuela leading up to and especially during Chávez's time in office, opposing many of Chavez's policies and looking out for the interests of the relatively well-off in Venezuela. With only twelve percent of Venezuela's

population involved in a labor union, the power that they have to affect policy through general elections is somewhat limited (Sustar 2005, 98). The small percentage of Venezuelans unionized is balanced by the unionization of certain important sectors in Venezuela, especially the oil industry. This unionization for decades made the CTV one of the greatest political forces in Venezuela, however it has declined with time, most clearly demonstrated in the failed 2002 coup and subsequent failed attempts to remove Chávez from office. After this coup, the labor movement separated into two distinct entities: the CTV and the UNT. Despite Venezuela not being one of the most unionized countries in the world, in its heyday the CTV was one of the "richest and most powerful union confederations in the world" (Sustar 2005, 99). Even during the 2002 coup, the CTV was receiving funding from the United States government through the National Endowment for Democracy. The Bush Administration initially supported the 2002 coup, before quickly retracting its support when it was clear that the coup would be unsuccessful. Chávez had viscously attacked Bush and the Western powers, and some argue that this is what caused Bush to overreact and alienate much of the global South during his presidency. His support and funding for the 2002 coup reinforced the Chávez administration's strong rhetoric opposing the United States and the West. Chávez also continued to cast his domestic political opponents as pro-American and anti-Bolívarian Revolution, warning that if he was removed from office it could mean that American power would go unchecked internationally. The CTV's power diminished from 1985 until Chávez's election because of the general liberalization of the international economy, especially in South America with the emergence of the Washington Consensus. This meant that labor unions would be limited in their capacities to enact change. I will discuss the role that the CTV has played in Venezuelan politics leading up to Chávez's time in office, its relationship before the coup (highlighting the alienation from Chávez), during the

coup, the break off of the UNT from the CTV, and the diminished role that the CTV has played in Venezuelan politics since the coup. This will allow us to see the context and causes of the break in the unity and devolution of power of Venezuelan labor.

The CTV was once praised by an international organization for being a part of "responsible" democratic trade unionism and creating a desire for wealth and entrepreneurship in Venezuela similar to that of the American dream (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). The oil boom that made Venezuela a rich country created this desire. Since 1958 the CTV has worked for "import substitution and state intervention in the economy" (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005), (Ellner, Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model: Innovations and Limitations, 2011). This tie to wealth, power, and upward mobility in Venezuela led to a lot of political capital throughout the following decades. Most specifically, the CTV was associated with the socio-economic rise of the unionized. The CTV catapulted its members to the top of the socioeconomic ladder, specifically oil workers. Associated with the AD, the CTV was able to be the major labor union without major competition until the 2003 split, which created the UNT (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). This strategy of unification, while leading to much political influence for decades, alienated many in the labor movement. This included those who envisioned the labor movement as a political adversary of the Chamber of Commerce, advocating for a higher minimum wage and other pro-worker policy positions. This discontent never created a real opposing labor movement until the CTV continued to overreach in their goals to shut down Chávez. It took the combination of Chávez's radical policies and the CTV's overreaction to his rise in order to create a split in the previously unified labor movement.

The CTV has never had a warm relationship with Chávez. Citing rampant accusations of corruption and poor representation of workers, Chávez called the old labor unions the "trade-union mafia" (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). With their support of the same neo-liberal policies that Chávez had spent his political career railing against, Chávez saw the CTV as a natural enemy of his new administration. Due to their high level socio-economic status, the CTV was more willing to ally with a more conservative strand of economic policies, including the neo-liberal policies pushed upon Venezuela. With much of the country's population without union representation and the CTV infrastructure being traditionally conservative, the CTV was also not a sector that Chávez needed to pay particular attention to during his initial campaign. Chávez was much more interested in appealing to those who had previously not been appealed to by traditional national candidates in the past. Once Chávez was in office, the CTV's close ties with the United States and the 2002 coup left Chávez with no desire or incentive to cooperate with them. With such a low rate of unionization and a high concentration of unionized workers in fairly affluent sectors relative to many non-unionized sectors of the Venezuelan economy, it was a natural fit for many Venezuelan workers to desire a continuation of the political system of the 1990s. Many union workers were in the upper middle class of Venezuela, but these ranks were depleting throughout the economic contraction, leaving them with less power and leaving Chávez with less incentive to appeal to them during his presidential campaign.

A big driver of the Revolution was increasing inequality among the very distinct classes in Venezuela. With increasing wages due to collective bargaining, those who were a member of a labor union did not face many of the challenges that other Venezuelans faced. The system in place was working for many in labor and there was an incentive to continue with the system as

is. If the Bolívarian Revolution were to be truly successful for Chávez, the labor oligarchy of decades past would have to be upended for a much less neo-liberal vision of Venezuelan unions. The Revolution implied that not only would Venezuela have to change, but the powers that be would have to be thrown out in order to give the people a new voice in labor. Venezuelan Congress considered "judicial proceedings against corrupt labor leaders, confiscation of trade-union property, and the dissolution of the CTV to create a 'united labor confederation'" (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). This, combined with the proposition of a "modern contract" which took away bonuses, eliminated labor-union only stores, and increased the duration of a collective bargaining agreement from two years to three years, backfired on those trying to undermine the CTV (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). This failure left PDVSA leader Ortega in a strong position to carry out his agenda, as he overwhelmingly won election as president of the CTV. Some on the left within the CTV questioned whether it was possible that Ortega was elected by such a wide margin and claimed that the election was rigged (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past, 2005). Immediately, Ortega allied with FEDECAMARAS with the goal of removing Chávez from office. This led to the four major strikes of 2001 to 2003. These strikes happened in December 2001, April 2002 (coup), October 2002, and December through February 2003 (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past). These strikes blew an even bigger hole between CTV leaders and those on the political left in the labor union, who were more sympathetic to Chávez and had long objected to the policies which the CTV advocated for, which they viewed as expressly anti-labor. Not only was the CTV persistently trying to oust Chávez, who they had some sympathy for as a leader, but they also were outraged

by Ortega's willingness to work with FEDECAMARAS and to bow to their political aspirations. It was at this point that the UNT was created in 2003, in response to the many violations of their alternate vision of organizing labor and using their political power to benefit workers.

After the October 2002 strike, Chávez took far more control of PDVSA, sensing that his opposition had lost much of its credibility. The PDVSA is "the foundation of his grandiose political project" (Shifter). After a string of defeats for the opposition, such as the failed coup, multiple failed strikes, and a failed 2004 recall election, Chávez had a renewed strength politically. He used the greater control he had over the oil industry to achieve his political goals. Chávez ordered the PDVSA to exceed the maximum amount of oil allowed to be produced by an OPEC member in response to a sputtering economy. He increased taxes and royalties on foreign firms wanting Venezuelan oil. He used this revenue to fund his aggressive social programs, providing health care, education, and other state services to the very poor. He also used the PDVSA to further his foreign policy goals. He gave 90,000 barrels of oil per day to Cuba in exchange for teachers, doctors, and some military support (Shifter 2006), (Vaillant 2005). He also gave a twenty percent discount to Mexico and many South American countries as a carrot for support on other issues, including opposition to United States neo-liberal policy (Danopoulos 2003, 64). PDVSA offices were opened internationally, including in Beijing (Shifter 2006). It was the overreach of the CTV that allowed Chávez to take control of the PDVSA and it was Chávez's control of the PDVSA that allowed him to deliver on his promises for both foreign and domestic policy.

Despite the challenges that they have faced, the CTV (with 1.2 million workers) remained one of the strongest political groups in Venezuela during the early Chávez years (Nelson 2009, 15). After becoming more conservative during the pressure of the Chávez years,

Ortega and the CTV joined with FEDECAMARAS in strong opposition to Chávez (Wilpert 2007). In April 2002, CTV leader Carlos Ortega demanded Chávez's resignation at a rally, urging the crowd to march to Miraflores, the presidential workplace. Ortega has a "pocked" complexion, cursed a lot, and was a "worker at heart." Ortega, together with the lighter-skinned FEDECAMARAS leader Pedro Carmona, presented a unified opposition to Chávez during the 2002 coup (Nelson 2009, 53). The coup's support by the American government indicated that the Americans believed that the new government would be more receptive to their neo-liberal policies and would be faithful in repaying the foreign debt accrued during the Oil Crisis. The CTV eventually dropped their support for the interim government during the coup when Ortega found out that Carmona was secretly meeting with military officials without notifying him. Ortega met with Carmona during his stint as Venezuela's president and was "visibly upset" regarding Carmona's decision to not include him as closely as he desired. After the coup, Ortega was sentenced to 16 years in prison for "political rebellion and treason" (Nelson 2009, 272).

With the break off of the left-leaning elements of the CTV forming the UNT, CTV officials accused the UNT of being an "arm of the state" (Sustar 2005, 98). The CTV argues that it is the labor union that is truly looking out for worker's interests. Some argue that the UNT will bow to any demand made by Chávez and that with its placement within the Ministry of Labor, it has no choice but to be a mouthpiece for the government. However, it is also clear that the UNT at least has elements that dissent from the policies supported by the Chávez presidency. The CTV's opposition to the UNT's perceived sympathy towards Chávez has created even more antipathy towards supporters of Chávez within the ranks of the CTV. The CTV has moved distinctly to the right since the creation of the UNT from the CTV, as there has been no incentive to moderate due to the exodus of many of its left-leaning members. The CTV has lost influence

politically. Still unified with AD, the AD currently only has nineteen of the one hundred sixty five seats in the National Assembly (Venezuela 2013). Once dominant and sharing power, AD has lost its role as a major political player.

When it was large and unified, the CTV exerted its influence not in the size of its voting block, but in its ability to use its political resources wisely. It was able to effectively organize its members and form partnerships with those in power in order to win the concessions that it desired from the government. As the economy collapsed, the CTV umbrella was largely spared from much of the pain that the rest of the Venezuelan economy felt during the Oil Crisis and the onset of the Washington Consensus. With the embrace of neoliberal policies and the widespread corruption in Venezuelan government, the electorate was hungry for change and elected Chávez. The downward pressure on the CTV from Chávez's policies caused the fracturing of the labor movement and the fall of the CTV's political influence.

UNT's Limited Success

The UNT is the emerging labor union umbrella group in Venezuela that is distinct from the CTV in structure, history, and ideology. I will discuss the emergence of the UNT from the Fuerza Bolívariana de Trabajadores (FBT), the details of the break off from the CTV, the distinctions in operation between the CTV and the UNT, the controversy surrounding the relationships between the UNT and the Chávez administration, and the political differences between the UNT and the CTV throughout Chávez's time in office (Ramirez 2005). These details will demonstrate both the how and why of the split in Venezuela's labor movement, creating the CTV and UNT due to the pressure created by the Chávez government's victories and consolidation of power.

The FBT is a Chavista wing of the UNT that was founded three years before the founding of the UNT (LaBotz, World Crisis, Capital and Labour 2009). It was the original defecting group opposing the neoliberal policies of the CTV. Though it has been attacked by the CTV as being the true arm of the state, full of Chávistas who are extremely loyal to the state, it does not receive any government funding. Despite no direct funds from the government, it has generally been a very loyal voice in the labor community for the Chávez presidency. Though the mere fact that the FBT is just a wing of the UNT demonstrates that not everyone in the UNT is loyal to Chávez. Another role of the FBT is the creation of a space for the rank and file to meet and talk about the revolution (Ramirez 2005, 88). One of the great strengths of Chavista organization is the regular meetings that are held at a local level on a regular basis. This sense of community and inclusion has created an even more loyal political base for Chávez. In fact, it was the local MVR members who marched to Miraflores and demanded that Chávez be put back into office after the 2002 coup (Danopoulos 2003, 67). The FBT has worked with the Carter Center to push for labor reforms. Because of Chávez's investment in local organizations that back him, there is a strong sense of community surrounding support of Chávez. The local level community building has been a unique way for a politician to organize his support. Instead of the support being solely based on the political image of a figure that many have had little to no interaction with, the community level based model of organizing allows for relationships to be built that are centered on the support of a political candidate. This allows for much more intense support to be built, even to the point of marching to Miraflores to put Chávez back in power.

When the UNT broke off from the CTV, it cited the failure of the CTV to deliver results for workers throughout its time as the major labor union representing Venezuelan workers. Instead, the CTV was wrapped up in its own internal political interests and couldn't see the

writing on the wall that times were changing in Venezuelan politics. The UNT seeks to become the dominant voice for Venezuelan workers, with policy and practice distinctly to the political left of the CTV's traditional role. The UNT cited the failure of real wages to rise for eighteen years, real wages falling twenty-three percent in the 1990's, and poverty at eighty percent as their reasons for breaking off (Sustar 2005, 98). It was founded in 2003 after a series of strikes and a coup to overthrow the Chávez government planned and executed by the CTV and allies were unsuccessful; many workers represented by the CTV at the time did not support these actions. Though there had been increasing talk throughout the years of a major break off from the CTV, many of the rank and file did not want to participate in a break because they feared parallel unionism in Venezuela. They feared that, instead of having a unified voice that could affect policy through a core voting block and monetary support, they would become distinct groups that were dramatically less effective at accomplishing their goals than the unified group was. Though unification meant that particular interests would not always get attention, they had the political muscle to make it more likely to accomplish some of their goals. They knew that parallel unionism would mean much less effective political influence for labor interests. In addition to the strikes, liberal members of the CTV were opposed to Ortega's collaboration with FEDECAMARAS and the absence of consultation with liberal leaders within the union about the actions that Ortega planned on taking. This lack of support led to the creation of the parallel labor union, despite the fears that a parallel union would limit the power of labor as a whole (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past).

From its inception, the UNT quickly differentiated itself from the CTV, creating a union that left behind the tradition of the old, established CTV and was distinctly to the left (in structure and policy) of the CTV. The UNT demanded universal unionization, meaning that

every sector's workers can "vote for a union in a way that is massive, plural, and in a representative [labor] central" (Sustar 2005, 98). They created a horizontal structure with twenty-one members on the board and no president or secretary general. The UNT wanted a "new confederation [to] avoid the structures and practices that had bred corruption" (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past 2005). This meant that recall referendums of union officials would be included and that there would be distinctive policies that they pursued which did not align with the Chávez presidency. The UNT is much more radical than the CTV, supporting idle factor takeover and worker self-management (Wilpert 2007, 187). Despite the intentions of this distinct structure, many of these attributes have backfired on the UNT, making it more difficult for them to make quick decisions. Its broad scope has also left those in the minority feeling that they could be more effectively represented by other groups, leading to further break off and overall disorganization that has limited the UNT's influence in Venezuela's labor and political scenes.

There is much debate about the extent of the UNT's independence from the government. Chávez created office space in the Ministry of Labor for the UNT, indicating that he was willing to work with the UNT and labor on worker's rights concerns, but also indicating that the state would have some control over the UNT's day to day operations (Sustar 2005, 103). The UNT has not, however, been fully approving of the Chávez agenda. "The Chávez government has given greater freedom for union organization and it has conceded some political, social, and economic gains. Nevertheless, the base of the government is made up of the poorest groups and it has made the greatest concessions to them," said UNT leader Stalin Pérez Burgos (LaBotz, The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn" 2007). This indicates that the UNT, while far more supportive of Chávez than the CTV, is at least not standing lockstep with him in their

public statements (Ellner, Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past 2005). They are also well aware that unions are not the main targets of Chávez's policy goals. The UNT, however, does see progress on labor issues from the Chávez presidency, though they complain that these improvements are not happening fast enough. This is sharply contrasted to the CTV's harsh criticism of the Chávez presidency and its attempted overthrow of his administration.

With the left-wing break off from the CTV, naturally some groups affiliated with the UNT are quite radical. Some labor unions affiliated with the UNT are to the left of Chávez, wanting more radical change (Wilpert 2007, 187). They claim that the Chávez administration has failed to "radically" change Venezuela. While the country is more equal, it is hardly *radically* more equal (David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University 2011, 20). Great inequalities remain between the very rich and the very poor. They desire more radical actions from Chávez that will lead to more equality socioeconomically. Chávez, however, has been wary to be too radical in his redistribution of wealth, as he is aware that with such inequality in Venezuela, it would be unwise to totally alienate the wealthy and upper-middle class in Venezuela. Though Chávez has been more than willing to challenge the traditional powers, he has not totally destroyed them.

Despite its setbacks, the UNT grew larger than the CTV by 2006 in number of workers. Also in 2006, the UNT suffered a major division that has seriously threatened its ability to be an effective voice for workers. Having already split from the CTV, the fractured labor movement has lost even more ground while trying to compete with other interests for attention from the Chávez government. "In September 2006, the UNT split into a majority faction that wanted to remain relatively independent of Chávez, and other factions that wanted to be Chavista"

(LaBotz, The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn" 2007). The lack of unity in the labor community has remained a major issue in being effective advocates in advancing worker's causes. Some on the left of the labor movement have feared that unification will lead to a Cuban-style dictatorship, where the Chávez administration can ignore the rights of workers, taking the support of workers for granted (LaBotz, The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn" 2007), (Sustar 2005, 99). They feared that too much support of the government would mean that they would have little leverage to win concessions from the government. These people argued that a delicate balance needed to be struck, otherwise worker's issues may be ignored all together. This was another natural split in the labor movement that further took away its political influence. Chávez's power and policy not only split the CTV and the UNT, but it also further divided the UNT. Instead of being the rising labor group in Venezuela after the CTV's fall, the UNT has failed to stay unified. Instead, the central issue of whether or not to be loyal to Chávez further divided the group.

The real beneficiaries of the Chávez regime are the working poor, not organized workers, which creates pressure on the UNT to deliver for the Venezuelan worker (Sustar 2005). With the Chávez presidency's focus on the urban poor, it has been difficult for the UNT to have major successes, though there have been some. The UNT has maintained a close relationship with Chávez and that has paid off to some degree. However, labor never was a priority for Chávez during his time as president. Therefore, the UNT failed to become the national labor movement that the CTV once was.

The UNT was a natural offshoot of the pressure that Chávez placed on the CTV to split over the policy and political differences of the two groups. The UNT's further split was a natural off-shoot of the pressure Chávez placed on those who wanted labor to be loyal to him and those

who thought the new labor movement should be an independent entity. These major splits (among other minor ones) left labor as a whole in a place where it did not have much influence in the government. Instead of being a unified body, it was a collection of fragments that did not have much power to oppose Chávez. It also didn't have the influence to win many major concessions from him, despite his liberal vision for the country. This split was caused by both Chávez's political moves that added significant pressure to the labor movement and the overreach of labor in opposing the policies of Chávez.

Conclusion

It is clear that the relationship between the government and the labor movement changed dramatically during Hugo Chávez's time in office. Going from being the unified backbone of one of the two strongest political parties in Venezuela to being a disorganized and ineffective group, labor devolved in power during the Chávez years. The catalyst of this division and fall was the Oil Crisis and the imposition of the Washington Consensus neoliberal policies. This left labor more disconnected than ever from the general Venezuelan population and blind to its own growing political irrelevance. With a political transition from party politics to the "politics of personality", the labor movement lost even more control over its political influence. Chávez continually won elections and labor became more irrelevant during each cycle. Chávez implemented policies that were openly hostile to the CTV and used the "oligarchs" in labor as a political punching bag, blaming much of Venezuela's persistent problems on their corruption and greed. Instead of fighting Chávez exclusively through democratic means, the CTV overreached and attempted a coup and several strikes aimed at removing him from power.

It was the combination of these two events that caused labor to divide and fall out of influence. Chávez openly attacked the CTV, which was so broad that it already had cracks within it that had not yet been publicly exposed. This attack left feeling vulnerable and waning in influence. In order to retain the power that they once had, they overreacted and tried to become the political entity it had previously been. This was no longer possible due to the economic crisis that Venezuela was in and the rapidly changing political scene in Venezuela. Therefore, in order to try to gain power in an increasingly powerless sector, labor split into ideological factions. The UNT split from the CTV in order to give voice to those on the political left who did not identify with a labor movement unified with FEDECAMARAS and Western neo-liberal policies. The UNT further split between those who want to be loyal to Chávez and those who do not want to be loyal to Chávez. With the labor movement in three major pieces, Venezuelan labor is just a shell of what it used to be. No longer having the power to strongly influence policy, labor has lost much of its power because of division.

Works Cited

David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University. The Revolution in Venezuela. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Danopoulos, Ronald D. Sylvia and Constantine. "The Chávez Phenomenon: Political Change in Venezuela." Third World Quarterly (2003): 63-76.

Ellner, Steve. "Does the Process of Change in Venezuela Resemble a "Permanent Revolution"? ." Dialectical Anthropology (2011): 249-253.

—. "Emergence of a New Trade Unionism in Venezuela with Vestiges of the Past." Latin American Perspectives (2005): 51-71.

—. "Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model: Innovations and Limitations." Journal of Latin American Studies (2011): 421-449.

LaBotz, Dan. "The Role of Labour in Latin America's "Left Turn"." North America Congress on Latin America (2007).

—. "World Crisis, Capital and Labour." Economic and Political Weekly (2009): 179-185.

Molina, Jose. "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Volivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)." Bulletin of Latin American Research (2002): 219-247.

Morgan, Jana. "Partisanship During the Collapse of Venezuela's Party System." Latin America Research Review (2004).

Nelson, Brian A. The Silence and Scorpion. New York: Nation Books, 2009.

Ramirez, Cristobal Valencia. "Venezuela's Bolívarian Revolution: Who are the Chávistas?" Latin American Perspectives (2005): 79-97.

Shifter, Michael. "In Search of Hugo Chávez." Foreign Affairs (2006): 45-59.

Sustar, Lee. Revolution and Counterrevolution in Venezuela: Assessing the role of the AFL-CIO. New Labor Forum, 2005.

Urribarri, Raul A. Sanchez. "Courts between Democracy and Hybrid Authoritarianism: Evidence from the Venezuela Supreme Court." Law and Social Inquiry (2011): 854-884.

Vaillant, Denise. "Education Reforms and Teachers' Unions: Avenues for Action." UNESCO (2005): 5-93.

Wilpert, Gregory. Changing Venezuela by Taking Power. London: Verso, 2007.